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Report of the Secretary-General on the deployment of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 17 of Security Council resolution 1828 (2008), by which the Council requested me to report every 60 days on the deployment and operations of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), the political process, the security and humanitarian situation in Darfur, and compliance of the parties with their international obligations. The report covers the months of February and March 2009.

II. Political developments

2. With respect to the political process, on 17 February in Doha, the Government of the Sudan and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) signed an "Agreement of Goodwill and Confidence-building for the Settlement of the Problem in Darfur", under the auspices of the African Union-United Nations Joint Chief Mediator, Djibrill Bassolé, and the State of Qatar. The "agreement" is a preliminary document which establishes the two parties' commitment to create an environment conducive to substantive talks. To that end, the "agreement" calls for the two parties to refrain from harassing internally displaced persons, to guarantee the smooth flow of humanitarian aid and to commit to an exchange of prisoners. The "agreement" also commits the parties to finalizing a more substantive framework agreement, which would describe in detail areas to be discussed during comprehensive negotiations. Following conclusion of the agreement, the Government and JEM left small negotiating teams in Doha in order to work with the joint African Union-United Nations mediation on developing elements of a framework agreement and to prepare for final negotiations.

3. As a demonstration of goodwill and in accordance with the "agreement", on 21 February the Sudanese Ministry of Justice announced the release of 24 detainees, describing them as members of JEM who were involved in serious crimes, including terrorism. The detainees were released into the custody of their families in Khartoum. In a statement on 23 February, JEM criticized the release, asserting that none of the individuals was a member of its faction. On the same day, JEM announced the release of 21 prisoners captured from the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF).

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4. Going forward, the Joint Chief Mediator plans to broaden rebel engagement through similar consultations so that all key stakeholders can eventually be involved in the envisaged comprehensive peace negotiations. In that regard, on 15 March 2009, five rebel groups (the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM)-Unity, SLM-Khamees, the United Revolutionary Force Front, SLM-Juba and JEM-Azraq) signed the "Tripoli Charter", an agreement to create a unified front and participate in the peace negotiations. The groups have committed to participating in the Doha process and are working with the African Union-United Nations Mediation and the Government of Qatar with a view to holding talks with the Government of the Sudan in the near future.

5. On 20 March, JEM announced that it intended to suspend participation in the Doha process and withdraw its representatives from Qatar until the Government of the Sudan reverses its decision to expel and dissolve 16 non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Nevertheless, the Mediation plans to work with JEM to encourage its continued participation in the Doha process.

6. As previously reported, subsequent to the Sudan People's Forum held in October and November 2008, the President of the Sudan established, on 21 January 2009, three committees to deal with key issues related to the Darfur conflict: the number of Darfur states, reconciliation, and the role of native administration. The Committee overseeing the review of the number of Darfur states has since commenced its work and visited Darfur on 27 and 28 March to hold consultations with various stakeholders. Other committees are yet to begin their work. Meanwhile, UNAMID has continued to engage local stakeholders on issues related to reconciliation and conflict resolution in the context of the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation mechanism.

III. Security situation

7. Notwithstanding the positive political steps made by the Government and JEM in Doha in February 2009, an alarming number of clashes took place between the two parties over the reporting period.

8. Following the withdrawal of JEM from the town of Muhajeriya in Southern Darfur on 3 February 2009, Government forces pursued JEM during its retreat northwards towards eastern Jebel Marra (Northern Darfur). I reflected this event in an earlier report to the Security Council (S/2009/83). Subsequently, on 11 February, clashes were reported on the ground between Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and JEM in the area north of Al Mallam and Dobo villages (west of Shangil Tobaya, Northern Darfur). As a follow-up action, on 5 February, Joint Special Representative Rodolphe Adada met with the JEM leadership in N'Djamena to establish an effective communication channel between JEM and UNAMID in areas controlled by the Movement and agreed in principle to establish a liaison and coordination mechanism for the protection and the safe movement of civilians and the humanitarian community.

9. UNAMID received numerous reports of aerial bombardment, including night attacks, of actual and suspected JEM positions by Government forces during the two-week period following the withdrawal of JEM from Muhajeriya, including reports of bombing of Dobo Madrassa, Tarny, Dabaneria, Dobo, Kutur, Fanga Suk, Deribat, Kazan Tanjur and Fa'luja (Northern Darfur) on 6 February; around Afara

Mountains near Beli Ali Seref village (20 km west from Shangil Tobaya, Northern Darfur) on 8 February; around Tarny village (60 km south-west of El Fasher) on 9 February; in areas of Dobo El Sug, Madrasa, Dabaneira, Dobo Djedid, Kutur Dubo, El Omda and Funga on 10 February; and Dobo Madrassa (Northern Darfur) on 13 February.

10. On 9 February, a UNAMID cargo helicopter on a supply mission from El Fasher to Mukjar (Northern Darfur) was fired upon while flying over Dabaneira village in the Al Mallam area. None of the four crew members on board sustained injuries. Although the windscreen of the helicopter was hit by a bullet, the aircraft was able to return safely to El Fasher.

11. On 17 February, JEM forces started to move north in the vicinity of Kafod (Northern Darfur) and engaged in clashes with the Government of the Sudan and SLA/Minni Minnawi (SLA/MM) forces simultaneously. JEM forces also clashed with Government forces at Turr, Daba Tuga and Donki Shatta, and with SLA/MM at Wana, Daba Tuga, Thabit and Wadi Mora areas (Northern Darfur) and were militarily engaged by other movements. Nearly all clashes were preceded by aerial bombardment by Government aircraft. Fighting continued until JEM retreated westward across the border into Chad around 25 February.

12. Since the beginning of March, Government forces have been carrying out a large military build-up in the area of Al Mallam, east of Jebel Marra, a traditional stronghold of SLA/Abdul Wahid (SLA/AW), now under the control of the Government. It is reported that the Government has concentrated its forces around Dobo Al Umdah and Dobo Madrassa blocking all entry points to the Jebel Marra Mountains (Northern Darfur).

13. In addition to the military operations by Government and movements' forces, clashes related to tribal affiliations continued to occur during the period under review. On 8 February, armed militia from the Mima tribe attacked SLA/MM personnel in the town of Wada'ah (95 km south-east of El Fasher, Northern Darfur), allegedly in protest against attempts by the Zaghawa-dominated SLA/MM to forcibly recruit among the local population and for exerting excessive taxes. On 10 February, approximately 500 SLA/MM soldiers reportedly launched a counter-attack in Wada'ah, destroying shops and houses before being driven out. At least 45 people were reportedly killed during the clash. The following day, on 11 February, Government forces entered the town, previously under the control of SLA/MM, and asserted their control of the area. A UNAMID delegation led by the Force Commander visited Wada'ah on 13 February, observing that nearly half of the town had been burnt down, including the market and the electrical plant. On that occasion, UNAMID evacuated one injured civilian to El Fasher.

14. In Southern Darfur, despite UNAMID-facilitated reconciliation efforts by local authorities between 25 December 2008 and 20 February 2009, fighting between the Fallata and Habaniya tribes erupted once again in the general area of Al Tomat (40 km south of Buram) on 9 March 2009. Initial reports indicate some 28 people were killed and six wounded. Reconciliation efforts failed because the suggested boundary demarcation between the tribes was unacceptable to the Fallata. Sporadic clashes continued throughout the reporting period, while UNAMID liaised with representatives of the two groups to facilitate the resolution to the conflict.

15. In another alarming incident, four major clashes occurred on 29 and 30 March between the Habaniya and Fallata tribes and between the Habaniya and Reizigat tribes in Southern Darfur. On 29 March, the Habaniya and the Reizigat reportedly battled in Al Kooka village, during which 161 persons were reportedly killed. On the same day in Sergeila area, Fallata forces clashed with the Habaniya. On 30 March, the Fallata and Habaniya engaged in clashes in the Saigoon area near Rajaj, during which 50 people were reportedly killed. Another clash took place between the two tribes in Mawada, with nine deaths reported.

16. Meanwhile, the security situation along the Sudan-Chad border continued to be tense and unpredictable during the reporting period. A build-up of Chadian armed opposition groups was observed in and around El Geneina (Western Darfur). Activities of Chadian armed opposition groups were reported in Sawani village in Sector West with estimated battalion sized strength. Chadian armed opposition groups have reportedly recruited among the internally displaced and local population in Um Shalaya, and a significant concentration of vehicles and troops was observed in several locations in Western Darfur, including in Sarafaya, where a new camp was allegedly established by the groups. In addition, joint military convoys of the Sudanese Armed Forces and Chadian armed opposition groups have been observed patrolling the border in the area of Kulbus (Western Darfur).

17. For the United Nations, the security level in Darfur remains at Phase IV. Notwithstanding the serious and ongoing military conflicts that occurred during the reporting period, random carjacking and banditry continue to pose the greatest general risk to United Nations personnel.

18. In this context, in accordance with decisions taken at the 19 January 2009 Tripartite Committee meeting held in Addis Ababa, in February 2009 the Government of the Sudan deployed 183 police officers to El Fasher to reinforce local police capacity, to combat criminality, particularly carjacking, and to provide outer perimeter protection of UNAMID facilities and installations. There are plans to expand this initiative to Nyala and El Geneina.

19. Nonetheless, the United Nations suffered 62 security incidents during the reporting period, including 9 carjacking incidents, while 54 incidents have been reported against international NGOs, including 15 carjacking incidents. In a positive development, arrests by Government of the Sudan police in El Geneina and El Fasher contributed to the recovery of stolen property.

20. In addition to being targeted by bandits hijacking vehicles, UNAMID was also deliberately attacked on three separate occasions during the reporting period. In El Geneina, a UNAMID military patrol was shot at by unknown bandits on 9 March, resulting in the injury of four soldiers and necessitating their medical evacuation to the Level-II hospital in El Fasher. Two of the injured soldiers were subsequently evacuated to a hospital in Khartoum. In a separate incident, on 10 March, a UNAMID military observer escaped unharmed after his vehicle was fired upon in El Daein town (Southern Darfur).

21. In one particularly serious incident on 17 March, eight unidentified armed men opened fire on a group of six UNAMID soldiers returning from a routine patrol between the UNAMID Forward Operating Base and the Supercamp in Nyala. One soldier was wounded in the exchange of fire, succumbing to his injuries during a medical evacuation to the UNAMID Level-II hospital in El Fasher.

IV. Humanitarian situation

22. During the reporting period, humanitarian assistance efforts in Darfur faced a number of serious challenges as a consequence of increased insecurity in the areas of Muhajeriya and Graida in Southern Darfur in early February and the expulsion of 13 international NGOs and suspension of three national NGOs on 4 March 2009.

23. Since 4 February 2009, large numbers of people have moved away from Muhajeriya and surrounding villages, as well as from rural areas between Muhajeriya and Shaeria. The vast majority of the migrating population are members of the Zaghawa tribe, some of whom have stated that they no longer feel safe since members of the Birgid tribe, who traditionally own the land and fled from it in 2005 and 2006, are returning. These movements were accompanied by accounts of the burning of some houses, neighbourhoods, and villages. Furthermore, UNAMID observed that almost all of the migrating Zaghawa are moving directly towards Zam Zam camp for internally displaced persons (17 km south of El Fasher, Northern Darfur).

24. The resultant arrival of some 36,000 internally displaced persons from Southern Darfur in the greater El Fasher area, and in particular to Zam Zam camp for internally displaced persons, has placed a severe strain on the surrounding environment. In particular, the water capacity in the camp is insufficient to provide all of the new arrivals the minimum standard of water per person per day. Government authorities have not yet allocated sufficient space to accommodate the newly arrived internally displaced persons, despite repeated requests by the United Nations. The situation remains dire, with thousands of new arrivals residing in the camp without basic shelter. UNAMID provides protection patrols as well as water supplies to Zam Zam on a nearly daily basis, and United Nations entities and NGOs complement the Government's efforts to receive the displaced by providing food, medicines and tents.

25. Humanitarian access to some areas of Darfur affected by fighting has been restricted in some cases during the reporting period. On 7, 10, 11 and 12 February, Government authorities did not provide flight clearance to various inter-agency assessment missions in Southern Darfur. These restrictions were imposed after reports of aerial bombardment in the region, and as tens of thousands of people were on the move in Shaeria locality. Access to areas of eastern Jebel Marra has also been consistently denied during the reporting period, allegedly because of insecurity.

26. In a serious and negative development, on 4 March, the Sudan's Humanitarian Aid Commission revoked the registrations and expelled 13 international NGOs as well as dissolved 3 national NGOs working in north Sudan with immediate effect, for allegedly collaborating with International Criminal Court investigations. As part of this process, Government officials also requested the organizations in question to hand over an inventory of assets, gathered banking details, confiscated office equipment such as laptop computers, and seized project materials in Khartoum, El Fasher, Zalingei, Garsila, and Mukjar (Northern Darfur). On 5 March, during an address to the Council of Ministers and a crowd of a few thousand people in Khartoum, high-ranking officials, including President al-Bashir and the Commissioner of Humanitarian Aid, confirmed the expulsion of the NGOs on the grounds that they had acted outside their mandate.

27. From 11 to 19 March 2009, joint Government of the Sudan-United Nations assessment teams worked in each of the three Darfur states to assess the gaps created by the expulsion or dissolution of the NGOs and define the capacities needed to address pressing needs in the food, health and nutrition, shelter and non-food items, and water and sanitation sectors. The teams' findings were discussed with senior officials of the Government and the United Nations in Khartoum on 21 to 22 March. The assessment noted stop-gap efforts under way include a one-time distribution of two-month food rations to 1.1 million people, the provision of potable water to some 850,000 people and expanded health services by the Ministry of Health through April 2009. However, critical gaps remain ahead of the rainy season, which may increase the spread of disease. Lastly, some 692,400 people will not receive shelter materials.

28. Even as these gaps were being identified, a meningitis epidemic erupted in Thur (near Nertiti) and in Kalma camp for internally displaced persons. While the outbreak is seasonal, it is exacerbated by the expulsion of NGOs working in the health sector. In order to bridge the gaps in a more sustainable manner, various stakeholders must ensure that funding, technical management and coordination capacity, as well as administrative arrangements, are in place.

29. On several occasions, at the request of the Humanitarian Coordinator, UNAMID provided protection for assets of expelled international NGOs. The mission also increased its patrols in key areas to reinforce the protection of civilians.

30. In addition to the deeply regrettable expulsion of NGOs, the aid community continued to suffer from violence throughout the reporting period, with 22 incidents against United Nations and international NGO compounds, including 10 alone in El Geneina in one week, well above figures for 2008. On 21 February 2009, an attack on a commercial vehicle by a group of armed bandits on the Nyala-Khor Abeche road in Southern Darfur resulted in the death of two international NGO national staff members. On 14 March, armed robbers broke into the compound of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Zalingei, stealing five vehicles.

31. In the first known incident of this kind in Darfur, three international and two national staff members of the international NGO Médecins Sans Frontières-Belgium were kidnapped in Saraf Umra in Northern Darfur on 11 March by a group of armed men. One national staff member was released the same day, while the remaining staff members were released on 14 March.

32. On a positive note, the Sudanese Ministry of Agriculture, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and World Food Programme carried out a livelihoods study which shows that food security had improved considerably in Darfur, and that 55 per cent of people were food secure as compared to 30 per cent in 2006-2007. Harvests were considerably better than in previous years and increased construction in towns and cities have helped provide employment. The study found that internally displaced persons in camps, as opposed to those in settlements or living among communities, remain the most vulnerable with regard to food security.

V. UNAMID operations

33. During the reporting period, UNAMID military conducted 750 confidence-building patrols, 1,053 village patrols, 108 night patrols, 349 escort patrols, 11 investigation patrols and 197 convoy escort patrols. UNAMID police conducted 3,876 patrols inside camps for internally displaced persons and 1,147 outside the camps.

34. The mission, however, continued to face restrictions on its freedom of movement. These restrictions were imposed mainly by the Government of the Sudan forces before and after military engagements with different movements, and were justified to UNAMID on security grounds.

35. For example, a UNAMID convoy from Zalingei was denied access to Mukjar (Western Darfur) on 17 February 2009, while a patrol from Khor Abeche to Al Mallam (50 km south-west of Shangil Tobaya, Northern Darfur) was denied access on 19 February, following clashes between Government forces and JEM in eastern Jebel Marra. In one instance, access to Al Riyadh camp for internally displaced persons in El Geneina (Western Darfur) was denied to a UNAMID night patrol on 8 March. This issue was subsequently resolved at the local level.

36. UNAMID police continued to expand its Community Policing Initiative during the reporting period through the construction or upgrading of two temporary community policing centres in Kalma camp for internally displaced persons (Southern Darfur) and between Abu Shouk and Al Salam camps (Northern Darfur). Following the mass influx of internally displaced persons to Zam Zam camp in El Fasher, UNAMID started construction of a community policing centre in the camp on 26 February. In total, UNAMID currently operates 58 such centres in or adjacent to camps for internally displaced persons and is working towards upgrading 17 centres inherited from the African Union Mission in the Sudan to United Nations standards.

37. UNAMID also conducted 16 training courses for the Government of the Sudan police, two training courses for the movements police and two courses for community policing volunteers in internally displaced persons camps across Darfur. With regard to training of local law enforcement entities, UNAMID Rule of Law and the police component facilitated two 5-day courses in El Fasher and Nyala for some 50 Government of the Sudan police personnel working in prisons on the treatment of inmates in detention.

38. From 8 to 13 March, UNAMID held a course on human rights, gender-based violence and child protection, for 25 Government police officers of mixed ranks at the Government Police Headquarters in Nyala. The course was officially opened by the Government Police Liaison Officer in Sector South. The course participants were drawn from various police units around Nyala and included 13 female participants, the highest representation yet as compared to previous such courses.

39. In addition to training police, UNAMID continued to assist internally displaced persons in identifying ways and means of improving the lives of women and children. In this context, the equal participation of women in all aspects of public life continues to pose a major challenge. UNAMID has been encouraging internally displaced women to become community policing volunteers and to join

security committees in camps for internally displaced persons. It is also encouraging women to start income-generating activities.

40. This is particularly important because the vulnerability of women in camps for internally displaced persons continues to be magnified by sexual and gender-based violence, including domestic violence. UNAMID has been working with women to encourage them to report such incidents. Incidents of rape continue to be underreported owing to the social stigma associated with the issue and distrust of Government police, including fear of being subjected to criminal prosecution if the victim is unable to meet the evidence threshold for the crime of rape as stipulated in the Evidence Act of 1993. In its own capacity and in accordance with its mandate, UNAMID continued to document incidents of sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, attempted rape, physical assault and harassment.

41. On 11 February 2009, the inter-agency gender-based violence working group met to review progress achieved in 2008 and identify priorities for 2009. It was observed that: (a) the number of reported cases of sexual and gender-based violence has increased; (b) more people now seek services and assistance; and (c) domestic violence was more widespread but also more reported in 2008. The fact that there have been a number of cases where the perpetrators have been brought to justice has had a positive impact on the local community.

42. In cooperation with the Northern Darfur Ministry of Social Welfare, UNAMID negotiated permission from the Humanitarian Aid Commission for the humanitarian community to reactivate women's centres in Abu Shouk, Tawilla, Al Salaam and Kutum camps for internally displaced persons; the women's centres have been closed since autumn 2008.

43. With respect to quick-impact projects, UNAMID established 24 additional projects during the reporting period. This brings the total of approved quick-impact projects at various stages of the implementation process to 142. In order to address remaining challenges, UNAMID has developed standard operating procedures for military and police components to monitor the implementation of such projects. Moreover, UNAMID conducted 30 field missions to identify and monitor the implementation of quick-impact projects, address conflict and reconciliation issues, as well as capacity-building needs.

44. In an effort to increase mine awareness, UNAMID delivered explosive remnants of war/mine risk education to 6,446 people, destroyed 115 items of explosive remnants of war, assessed 50 villages, and surveyed more than 200 kilometres of road during the period under review.

45. On 25 February 2009, the Director of the National Security and Intelligence Service for Southern Darfur informed the Mine Action Office that they did not have a mandate to work in Southern Darfur, and asked that these issues be taken up with the Government of the Sudan in Khartoum. To ensure consistency, from 2 March 2009, all mine action activities throughout Darfur have been suspended until further instruction from the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs.

46. During the reporting period, UNAMID was unable to access detention facilities run by the National Intelligence Security Services and its access to prisons was often limited owing to delays in receiving authorization from the Ministry of the Interior.

VI. UNAMID deployment

47. As at 31 March 2009, the total strength of UNAMID military personnel was 13,134 out of a total authorized strength of 19,555, including 12,494 troops, 375 staff officers, 188 military observers and 77 liaison officers. This figure represents 67 per cent of the Operation's total military authorized strength.

48. The main increase in military strength during the reporting period was attributable to the arrival of additional Senegalese personnel that brought the battalion up to its full United Nations strength of 800. These new arrivals deployed to El Geneina (Western Darfur), allowing the Nigerian Company temporarily deployed there to relocate back to its parent battalion in Sector South.

49. In addition, during the reporting period, the rotations of the remainder of the Senegalese battalion, as well as of the Kenyan Military Police, the Gambian Force Protection Company and the Egyptian Signals Company were completed in mid-February 2009 and the Nigerian Level-II hospital in mid-March 2009. Two hundred military personnel of the advance element of the second Egyptian battalion, including a light engineer element, also arrived in Darfur on 30 and 31 March.

50. Nearly all contingent-owned equipment for units currently in theatre has reached its final destination. The remainder of contingent-owned equipment for the Pakistan Engineering Company is expected to arrive by the end of March.

51. The movement of new Senegalese and Rwandan equipment will lead to an improvement in the operational capacity of the mission. While there are plans for local training of troops in Darfur upon receipt of this new equipment, troop-contributing countries need to continue to adequately train and prepare troops prior to rotations and ensure that they have the capacity, systems and materials for maintaining the new and existing contingent-owned equipment in Darfur. The maintenance and serviceability of contingent-owned armoured personnel carriers is an ongoing concern since the volatile security situation in Darfur demands the availability of armoured personnel carriers and protected force mobility at all times.

52. Despite the arrival of additional troops and units, the mission's actual operational impact remains constrained by the continued absence of key enablers such as the medium transport units, an aerial reconnaissance unit, a Level-II hospital (which would be placed in El Fasher) and 18 medium-utility helicopters. Preparatory work for the arrival of five tactical helicopters from Ethiopia is ongoing.

53. On 31 March, the strength of UNAMID police personnel stood at 2,478 (1,779 police advisers and 5 formed police units totalling 699 personnel) out of a total authorized strength of 6,432. Given the prevailing Phase IV security environment, UNAMID determined that it was only in a position to provide security assurances for a maximum of 1,800 unarmed police officers. This ceiling is under constant review and it is expected that UNAMID will increase the ceiling, which will allow for an increased rate of deployment of individual police officers.

54. As at 31 March 2009, the number of civilian personnel stood at 3,388, or 61 per cent of the approved strength of 5,557. The deployed civilian staff comprised 942 international staff, 2,142 national staff and 299 United Nations Volunteers. UNAMID continues to face serious challenges in recruiting and retaining international staff because of security and health risks and threats involved in Darfur, as well as owing to the harsh living conditions. During the reporting period,

10 international staff members departed UNAMID owing to resignations, reassignments or completion of appointments. Since the start of the mission, a total of 98 international staff members have departed UNAMID and 134 selected international candidates have declined offers of appointment, which translates into 24.5 per cent of the currently recruited international staff. Many more international candidates declined to be interviewed for UNAMID.

Tripartite Committee for the deployment of UNAMID

55. The Tripartite Committee on UNAMID, consisting of representatives of the Government of the Sudan, the African Union and the United Nations, held its fourth and fifth periodic consultations during the reporting period on 18 February in Khartoum and on 31 March 2009 in El Fasher, respectively. This mechanism has fostered cooperation between the Government, the United Nations and the African Union on all matters affecting the deployment and operations of UNAMID, and has proven to be an effective instrument to resolve any difficulties that may arise on the ground.

56. At its most recent meeting on 31 March in El Fasher, UNAMID presented a state-of-deployment briefing to provide the Government of the Sudan, African Union and United Nations delegations with an update on the current deployment and highlight key milestones to occur during the next quarter and towards the end of the year. The three delegations focused on key deployment milestones of 2009, including in particular the deployment of light tactical helicopters pledged by Ethiopia.

57. With respect to the assets of international NGOs whose licenses were revoked, the Government agreed that UNAMID would safeguard this equipment and materials until a solution is reached according to the signed agreement between the Government of the Sudan and the international NGOs. The participants commended the successful implementation of the Tripartite Committee's decisions and agreed to meet again in early June 2009 in Darfur.

VII. Observations

58. The situation during the reporting period was dominated by the decision on 4 March, of the Pre-Trial Chamber I of the International Criminal Court to issue a warrant for the arrest of Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir, President of the Sudan, for two counts of war crimes and five counts of crimes against humanity. I recognize the authority of the International Criminal Court as an independent judicial institution, and trust that the Government of the Sudan will address the issues of peace and justice in a manner consistent with Security Council resolution 1593 (2005). Notwithstanding that development, I have reiterated the determination of the United Nations to continue to conduct its vital mediation, peacekeeping, humanitarian, human rights and development operations and activities in the Sudan, and call on the Government of the Sudan to cooperate fully with all United Nations entities and their implementing partners, while fulfilling its obligation to ensure the safety and security of the civilian population, United Nations personnel and property, and that of its implementing partners.

59. In that regard, the Government's decision to expel or dissolve a total of 16 humanitarian and human rights NGOs was an extremely negative development. While joint United Nations-Government of the Sudan efforts can address some of the most critical gaps in aid delivery in the coming weeks, the cumulative effects over time of the removal of such a large amount of humanitarian capacity puts well over 1 million people at life-threatening risk. The rainy season starting in May is likely to make the situation significantly worse.

60. I call on the Government urgently to re-establish an atmosphere of trust and mutual confidence with the humanitarian community. We must continue to work together to identify, prioritize and fill the most immediately life-threatening gaps. The Government of the Sudan should genuinely facilitate the work of the remaining agencies and NGOs, in particular by signing technical agreements. I urge the Government of the Sudan to reconsider its decision, not least bearing in mind its responsibility for the well-being and protection of its own citizens, and meanwhile to work with the United Nations and all partners in the same spirit.

61. I am also extremely concerned about the impact of this action on the work of UNAMID. A significant disruption in the provision of humanitarian assistance will almost certainly lead to a serious heightening of tensions among internally displaced persons, particularly in the larger camps for the displaced. These added tensions could increase the risk of violence in the camps and their environs, complicating the ability of UNAMID to perform its protection mandate. UNAMID troop- and police-contributing countries have expressed serious concern in this regard during a meeting on Darfur of the African Union Peace and Security Council, held on 5 March.

62. In the meantime, the overall security situation in Darfur remains a fundamental preoccupation, and I am particularly concerned by the reports of continued armed clashes between the Government and the movements, recurrent tribal fighting throughout Darfur and the build-up of forces along the Sudan-Chad border. In addition, the security of United Nations and United Nations-associated personnel has become a critical issue. Vehicle hijackings and compound invasions have grown increasingly deliberate in nature, highlighted by the kidnapping of five Médecins Sans Frontières-Belgium staff in March. Attacks on UNAMID personnel have also increased, including the killing of one peacekeeper and the injury of three others during the month of March. Since the transfer of authority, UNAMID has lost a total of 14 peacekeepers, reminding us of the great danger of deploying a peacekeeping operation in an environment with no peace to keep.

63. As a result of the insecurity, UNAMID has been unable to visit locations to assess the impact of the bombardments on the civilian population, including with regard to the resultant casualties, destruction of property and displacements. In Muhajeriya, the clashes and intensive aerial bombardment at the beginning of February necessitated the relocation of all unarmed UNAMID personnel to Nyala, while UNAMID military who remained at the team site sought to provide protection to the population affected by the conflict. At one point, as many as 10,000 individuals gathered around the perimeter of the UNAMID camp in Muhajeriya, placing considerable strain on the Operation's protection capacity.

64. The latest security developments highlight, once again, the fundamental challenges that UNAMID continues to face while operating in an environment

where the parties show no intent to give up the use of force, and further underscore the urgent need for a comprehensive settlement to the Darfur crisis.

65. Despite these challenges, UNAMID is focusing on ensuring that it is able to maximize resources at hand and implement its protection mandate. An important requirement will be to consolidate the capabilities of the troops currently on the ground. Nevertheless, with limited capability at its disposal, over the reporting period, UNAMID has nevertheless been able to make a difference on the ground. The provision of outstanding equipment, in particular military helicopter assets, remains critical to increasing the mobility and operational impact of the mission. I reiterate my appeal to Member States who are in a position to provide these mission-critical capabilities to do so without further delay.

66. It will also be extremely important for troop and police contributors, in some cases with support from donor countries, to accelerate their preparations and readiness to deploy. If this does not take place, we will not meet our deployment targets. Our partnership with the African Union has been fundamental to the success achieved thus far and I would like to reiterate our commitment towards continued collaboration and cooperation on Darfur.

67. We are at a critical moment with respect to Darfur: the decision to expel the NGOs has put innocent civilians at risk and increased the potential for instability in the region. In this climate, it is all the more urgent to find a solution through political dialogue. The Agreement of Goodwill and Confidence-building for the Settlement of the Problem in Darfur, signed on 17 February 2009 by the Government of the Sudan and JEM in Doha, was the first step towards an inclusive dialogue.

68. The path ahead for the political process is still long and fraught with pitfalls. For the time being, the recent actions of the main parties have neither reduced tensions nor reflected the spirit of compromise necessary for a successful peace process. I reiterate my call on all parties to work together with Joint Chief Mediator Bassolé and continue their engagement in the political process. The sine qua non to end suffering in Darfur continues to be a negotiated political solution, supported strongly by a united international community and the Security Council.